

What It Means to Be 'Writing a Book'

No one will take your book seriously until you do

[Li Charmaine Anne](#)

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Ever since high school, I have been “writing a book.”

“What have you been up to lately?” an Auntie would ask at a family dinner. “I’m going to school, I’m playing piano, and I’m writing a book,” teen me would answer.

“What have you been up to lately?” the same Auntie would ask five years later. “I’m majoring in Creative Writing, working part-time, and writing a book,” I’d answer.

I have been “writing a book” for as long as I can remember. Most of my life has been spent in the perpetual liminal state that is “writing a book.” All despite the many long stretches of weeks and months where no writing of the said book took place.

Of course, I’m always *thinking* about book-writing, but does that count?

I think not.

The world doesn’t believe in serious writers

At some point in our careers, we writers swallow the bitter pill that society doesn’t always respect us. Writers are told to get “real” jobs. English and other liberal arts majors are deemed useless. Major in one and become a starving artist dependent on government handouts and the café tip jar to survive.

To be fair, I’ve only had one IRL incident of having my career and academic choices called into question.

“Writing...isn’t that more of a hobby?” a middle-aged

man said to me once. He'd added a playful smirk as if to mean he was only joking.

He didn't take me seriously. But to be frightfully honest, on most days, I don't take myself seriously.

I shouldn't have said I was writing a book during those years when I was "writing a book." Because I wasn't. And now that I *am* seriously writing a book, every time someone asks me what I'm up to and I tell them, I can see their eyes glaze over. *Right, you're "writing a book."*

Perhaps the world doesn't take writers seriously precisely because of people like me, people who say they're writing a book but never have a book to show for it.

I'm not saying that book-writing has to be a full-time job. Plenty of books get written in the twilight hours between one's nine-to-five and one's bedtime. But if you're consistently leaving work to go write your book, only to feel tired and say, "fuck it, let's eat pizza instead," are you really writing a book?

What it means to write a book

In my humble opinion, writing a book means you do all these things:

- **Write regularly.** You get to decide what "regular" means, but it has to be consistent. If you say you're

going to write for one hour a day, write one hour a day.

- **Set deadlines.** Ditch the “it’ll be done when it’s done” attitude and set deadlines for your first draft, beta-ready draft, and query letters.
- **Read.** While I’ve seen some people disagree, I believe reading is part of studying your craft and it should be a regular part of a writer’s workday. I dare say you can even log reading time as part of your “productive hours.”
- **Write actual words.** You can lurk on forums and ask other writers how to write “properly” all day, but until there are actual black words on white paper, you’re not a writer. At some point, you have to [stop preparing and start writing](#).
- **Be read.** Most people write a book with the intention that someone else will read it. Don’t be too precious with your story. Tell others about it. Share chapters. Get opinions. Books are meant to be read and unless you’re writing a personal diary, your project is not a book unless it’s read.

These are just personal guidelines. You may disagree with mine and have your own. That’s okay.

The key isn’t having a tight schedule or set word count per day. The key is — as one of my editor friends likes to say — *consistency*. Chefs are consistently chefs. Doctors are consistently doctors. Writers must consistently be writers, and that means writing consistently.

Tongue twisters aside, treat your book-writing as a job. Because until you take it seriously, no one else will.

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EDIT (17/Sept/2020): Wow! I didn't anticipate this article would get so much love. Thank you to everyone who read and made the time to respond! I am seriously inspired and humbled by all of you. (Also added a link to cite a Reddit post that originally inspired my "don't lurk on forums and just write" advice.) I honestly did not set out to write an "advice" article because I do not see myself as an expert (I'm learning just like you!) so it warms me that so many people found value in this. Thanks again!